

CÁRDENAS, Alonso de, **La Revolución inglesa (1638-1656)/The English Revolution (1638-1656)**: Ángel Alloza y Glyn Redworth (eds.), Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2011, 178 págs., ISBN: 978-84-9940-168-3.

Alonso de Cárdenas (ca. 1592-1666) —also known as Alonso de Peralta— was a minor nobleman with good connections who held a variety of posts in the Spanish administration. After service in Naples, he spent an unusually long time in England, first as chargé d'affaires beginning in 1638, and then as ambassador from 1640 to 1655. He capped his successful rise up the bureaucratic ladder by being awarded seats on the Councils of State, War, and the Indies. Cárdenas has attracted the notice of historians recently, thanks to his crucial role in the acquisition of choice works of art for Philip IV and his minister D. Luis de Haro in the auction opened in 1649 by the financially pressed English Parliament of the collections of the recently executed king Charles I. There is now new reason to pay attention to this relatively little known figure: the publication by Ángel Alloza and Glyn Redworth of a singular document, the report he drew up in 1656 on events during the last decade and a half in the British Isles. One can only welcome this double gift, of a perceptive analysis by a keenly observant Spaniard of the political drama of mid-seventeenth-century England, now made available in the original Spanish and in English translation.

On the face of it, the «Relación del estado presente de las cosas de Inglaterra» offers a quick-paced summary of political conflict in England. It opens in 1638, with the Scottish revolt against the imposition of religious uniformity which would soon force Charles to call Parliament back into session following

eleven years of «Personal Rule» without it. Cárdenas deftly summarizes the growing rift between the king and the House of Commons; his focus is tightly political, and he has little to say about the military aspects of the confrontation, or of the king's execution in 1649. Rather, the centrepiece of his story is the rise of Oliver Cromwell, whose successful bid for power he charts until 1655, when the Spanish government recalled him following the unsuccessful English attack on Santo Domingo. Ordered by Madrid to stay close to the scene, he wrote his relation shortly after his arrival in Brussels, where he remained until he was finally allowed to return to Spain in 1660.

The «Relación» is, in other words, a contemporary history of sorts, and one following closely on the events themselves. Indeed, it is one of the very first historical summaries of the revolutionary changes which took place in England during the final years of the Thirty Years' War and its immediate aftermath. Yet fresh as it is, what is perhaps most striking about this report is its calm, dispassionate character, and its ability to synthesize a highly complex sequence of events in some twenty folios. It certainly conveys a positive impression of the professionalism of the Spanish diplomatic service. It also testifies to the willingness of Cárdenas and his government to hew to overriding considerations of reason of state and to swallow any moral and confessional qualms in dealing with a new Protestant regime that soon turned republican and regicide.

Cárdenas mentions a fair number of names, but in the end only two individuals loom large in his narrative. The first is Charles. The «Relación» does little to counter the traditional view of the monarch as inept, irresolute, and all too prone to making crucial mistakes in judgment. From the beginning Cárdenas has strong words for Charles' record of mismanagement of the emerging crisis, and openly points to the king's willingness to sacrifice close collaborators such as Laud and especially Strafford as literally fatal errors. Cromwell, however, comes across in this report as a man of an altogether different make. The diplomat repeatedly depicts him in highly charged terms as a cunning and utterly unscrupulous Machiavellian. One typical phrase portrays the Protector as an «insigne disimulador sin fe, sin ley, sin palabra, engañador y astuto hipócrita», who did not balk at using religion to win «gente y la persuadía sus trazas y sus ficciones» [80]. Such language served in part as a means of countering the many critics of his decision to remain in London following the execution of the king—itself an exercise in cool political realism that doubtless would have caught the Florentine's eye. But one also can detect between the lines a clear recognition of the abilities of an astute political leader, whose instincts began to falter him only when the growing unpopularity of his regime led him to gamble on the reckless and unsuccessful incursion into the Spanish Caribbean known as the «Western Design».

That said, Cárdenas does not limit his focus to the clash of two very different individuals. Rather, one notes here a second important feature of this text: the author's recognition that the overthrow of the monarchy involved a considerably wider cast of characters

than were found in the traditional centers of power of Whitehall and Westminster. The Spaniard had a keen eye for reading the shifting divisions on the parliamentary side, and especially the growing opposition to the more conservative Puritans known as Presbyterians on the part of the «partido Independiente» [77]. The latter brought together various strands of religious and political dissidence. Above all, its strength lay in an increasingly restive Army and the emergence of the «pueblo» as a political actor, whose «movimientos» [76] were orchestrated in part through print. Cárdenas remarks in several passages the way pamphlets, broadsheets, and other ephemera helped mobilize popular agitation against royalist or even Parliamentary rule. In one such phrase he notes the flair of the Independents for «divulgando en estampa papeles llenos de enormes delitos que imputaban a los presbiterianos» [80]. Where this line of argument seems to be heading was also no mystery. The ambassador makes brief but interesting references to the rise of a radical democratic movement; «lebelers» is the term he accurately quotes, and whom he defines as seekers of «democracia perfecta» [92]. Even so, there are limits to what he can see from the court. His analysis rarely departs from the strictly political plane, and he has virtually nothing to say about socioeconomic grievances, much less even more radical religious dissenters, apart from a brief reference to Anabaptists and other defenders of «una libertad de conciencia grande» [79].

Still, Cárdenas does not offer only chronicle. He also comments on causes. To be sure, his explanation of the English Revolution centers on political factors, both in the medium and short run—Lawrence Stone's «precipi-

tants» and «triggers». Yet he also thinks of politics in terms of more stable institutional arrangements and understandings—what we would call its constitutional elements. (Closely aligned to this is his ability to identify England's longterm diplomatic interests, which he briefly summarizes in a list of «maxims» regarding foreign policy with which he closed his text [113-114]). Finally, he explicitly acknowledges the impact of religion—more specifically, differences in religious opinion—on public matters. Cromwell may have struck him as a dissembler without any fundamental beliefs, except in his own «desmedida... soberbia y ambición» [100]. Yet he triumphed thanks to the deep beliefs of others, and his ability to convince many Englishmen that his cause went far beyond party or faction to embrace the designs of providence itself.

Alloza and Redworth do a credible job of presenting the original text, which they offer with modernized spelling, punctuation, and accents. That their editorial apparatus is not too overbearing is to some extent the responsibility of Cárdenas himself. His style is to the point, even terse, and he indulges little in the fulsome rhetoric of his times. (Especially striking is the paucity of classical references in these Tacitean times). The editors do intervene to identify the individuals mentioned—a necessary task when Cárdenas' spells the names of the famous Five Members of 1642 as Peni, Holis, Haselrig, Stroud, and Hanbden! They also compensate for the penury of details in parts of the report (for example, regarding the civil wars) by quoting in footnotes from the contemporary diplomatic despatches through which the ambassador kept Madrid up to date with the evolving political and military

situation. Finally, following the English translation of the «Relación», they add two useful appendices. The first is a contemporary Spanish version of the execution of Charles I, «traducida de las relaciones que han salido en inglés» [163-173]. It provides an interesting, and remarkably austere account of this event, with virtually no additions or commentary. The second appendix consists of two brief letters regarding the Western Design by members of Sir William Penn's fleet which Cárdenas obtained and forwarded from London in August 1655.

There is little to reproach in this edition. Admittedly, it would have been nice to have more information about Cárdenas himself—his education, for example, and his labors in state administration prior to reaching England. With luck, the circulation of this text will spur further research along these lines. One notes the occasional disconcerting habit of baptizing seventeenth-century Englishmen with Spanish names, as when the Parliamentary secretary (and future Clerk of the House of Lords) Henry Scobel appears as Enrique Scobel [14n]. Only a few errata surfaced: on p. 108n the name of well-known general (and Milton's friend) Robert Overton is spelled Oberton, with the Leveller spokesman John Wildman as Wildham. And on p. 17 a footnote refers to the Thomason Tracts in the National Library of Scotland, which one assumes is a reference to a microform copy there, given that the original collection is housed in the British Library. (The online catalogue of the Edinburgh library makes no mention of a Thomason collection there). Finally, I found at least one comment somewhat jarring. On p. 58, after venting displeasure at the «hagio-

graphy» surrounding Cromwell in contemporary England, the editors refer to Charles' execution as a «judicial murder». I for one can think of all sorts of reasons for disliking Cromwell, being part Irish and a Leveller at heart. But unless this is a reference to all executions as being judicial murders—a perfectly reasonable assertion, if you ask me—I am led to wonder exactly how one could have legally executed any king at that time. Perhaps here a lesson could be learned from Cárdenas himself, who tempered his clear animus against Cromwell with a measured assessment of his considerable political

abilities. As noted above, the *sang froid* is quite impressive.

This early—earliest?—history of what we now call the English Revolution apparently circulated fairly widely in seventeenth-century Spain. So much is suggested by the fact that Alloza and Redworth have located five contemporary copies in addition to the original manuscript in the Cambridge University Library [14n]. Now, thanks to their labors, it has the chance to travel even further. One hopes that many readers on both sides of the Channel will take advantage of this opportunity.

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